Trump’s $1.8 Billion ‘MAGA Slush Fund’ Is His Most Shameless Grift Yet

thedailybeast.com/trumps-17-billion-maga-slush-fund-is-his-most-shameless-grift-yet

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CHECKS & BALANCES

A president who pardoned Jan. 6 rioters is now demanding taxpayers compensate them.

Opinion

Photo Illustration by Elizabeth Brockway/The Daily Beast/Getty

Grift and Graft, the twin pillars of Trump’s presidency, are the basis of his latest and most daring ploy—awarding himself a $1.776 billion slush fund of taxpayer money to mark the nation’s 250th anniversary, and distributing the money with no public accounting, large chunks going to January 6 insurrectionists no less.

It is a complete bastardization of that dark day’s assault on the Capitol, and conjures for me the children’s nursery rhyme, “Sing a Song of Six Pence”—the wicked king is in the counting house while workers get their minimal daily wage and whiskey. Well, we could all use a drink.

Is it just another stop on the president’s petty revenge tour? Another attempt to rewrite history and turn those who violently assaulted our Capitol—and members of the Capitol Police Department—into wronged patriots? Or could it be something

darker, as Democrat Jamie Raskin, ranking member of the House Oversight Committee, told Rachel Maddow: an attempt "to fund or pre-fund Trump's private militia."

It's astonishing how many streams of income Trump and his family have tapped into, coupled with self-aggrandizing projects like the Trump Kennedy Center, the East Wing ballroom, the gold coins with his likeness, the gold Trump cards, the banners (not gold, but oh well) with his face on unfurled outside the Department of Justice, and the planned 250-foot-high arch that would tower over the Lincoln Memorial and present potential danger to pilots navigating their way down the Potomac to Reagan National Airport.

Ringside seats to a wrestling match on the White House lawn this summer are going to the highest bidders, along with no-bid contracts to Trump pals to paint the reflecting pool blue. Pardons are open to all if the price is right; I don't think they're selling seats on Air Force One yet, but Trump's high-rolling, high-flying guests surely make it up to him in other ways. The Washington Post recently revealed that the administration was piggybacking on an unrelated contract for engineering services at the White House to cover work on the "Arc du Trump" more than a mile away. Trump's MO is to never ask permission, just plunge ahead. So far, no one has been able to stop him. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a nonprofit group that Trump has not co-opted, is still fighting to have work on his ballroom go through the normal approval process. But the courts are slow and the destruction continues.

"I love the sound of construction," Trump says after the demolition process began last fall. "It's music to my ears."

U..S. President Donald Trump at the site of ongoing construction of the planned White House ballroom in Washington, D.C., U.S., May 19, 2026. Kevin Lamarque/REUTERS

The precedent for creating a fund with executive branch discretion to distribute money to people who have been wronged dates back to the Obama administration and its effort to award damages to Native American farmers who had been systemically locked out of federal assistance for decades.

But what Trump has done is sue his own government for ten billion dollars (for leaking his tax return during his first administration, despite every other president since Richard Nixon making their returns public). Then he settled for $1.776, wrapping himself in the cloak of Independence Day to reward felons.

“Trump didn’t just pardon his followers who stormed the U.S. Capitol. He’s now set them up for payments through a slush fund he created to reward his allies—out of your tax dollars. You could not make this up,” Hillary Clinton wrote on social media.

“Everything about it smells like corruption,” a nonprofit advocate on Capitol Hill told the Daily Beast. “There’s no money for student loans, child tax credits, healthcare subsidies while money is going to ICE… and now a slush fund for insurrectionists that bypasses Congress entirely. Fiscal conservatism has nothing to do with actually saving money. It’s all about what Trump wants.”

History is written by the victors, and Trump is recasting January 6 as patriots, former FBI director James Comey as a “dirty cop,” for pushing what Trump calls “the Russian hoax,” and those who were involved in election-stealing efforts in 2020 as heroes. Election denier Tina Peters, a county clerk in Colorado who gave

Trump allies access to voting machines and let them copy hard drives, was just freed by Democratic governor Jared Polis after Trump pardoned her for federal crimes related to the 2020 election. Gov Polis, under pressure, commuted the sentence for the 70-year-old who has become a martyr for election conspiracy theorists.

Pro-Trump supporters storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC.
Samuel Corum/Getty Images

Brendan Nyhan is a political scientist at Dartmouth College and co-director of Bright Line, a project that began in 2017 to track the perception of the state of democracy among political scientists, federal judges, top lawyers, and law professors at top-ranking universities—granted, the deep state personified if you were to ask Trump. But in Bright Line's most recent polling, all of these groups "perceive a significant erosion of the rule of law since Trump returned to office, including politicized law enforcement, a dysfunctional separation of powers, and executive-branch overreach."

One Republican-appointed Court of Appeals judge wrote that, "The nation is strong as is its commitment to the rule of law, but the current president presents the greatest threat in decades."

Asked if Trump's DOJ does favors or gives benefits to allies, 91 percent said yes compared to seven percent when Merrick Garland led the Biden DOJ. Asked if Trump's DOJ has been used to go after personal or political enemies, 94 percent said yes compared to eight percent under Biden.

“Even legal conservatives who questioned what Biden had done [in the wake of January 6] felt this goes too far,” says Nyhan. “We came very close to having the vice president and speaker of the House killed, and here we are not just pardoning people convicted of a crime by their peers but giving them over a billion in taxpayer dollars.”